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Thursday, 6 December 2007, 10.40 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Spatafora	(Italy)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Okio
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Peru	Mr. Voto-Bernales
	Qatar	Mr. T. Al-Ansari
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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07-62908 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ambassador John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

It is so decided.

I invite Ambassador Holmes to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

The Security Council will now hear a briefing by Ambassador John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Holmes: I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to brief the Council on my visit to Ethiopia, the Sudan and Somalia from 26 November to 4 December.

In Ethiopia, I wanted to assess the humanitarian situation in the Somali region and discuss with the Government widespread fears of a severe humanitarian crisis there. The Somali region, one of the poorest regions of Ethiopia, has long been badly affected by the conflict between Government forces and the Ogaden National Liberation Front. Intensification of the conflict during 2007 has led to fears that already chronic food insecurity could give way to real famine conditions for a significant part of the 4.5 million-strong population.

A United Nations assessment team, which visited the region in early September, identified specific reasons for concern. First, the military operations, and in particular Government concerns about the smuggling of weapons from Somalia, had severely limited movement of commercial traffic across the Somali border. This is a historic trade route supporting the livelihood of 1.4 million people, predominantly pastoralists, whose income to buy food from across the border depends on the export of livestock.

Secondly, insecurity has also had a direct effect on the delivery of food aid, required in recent years to assist the most vulnerable elements of the population. For example, it is currently estimated that 950,000 people require 53,000 metric tons of food for the next three months, but the process of moving the first 9,000 tons to the district capitals has only just been completed. A poor recent rainy season and evidence of worrying health and nutrition situations have added to these fears.

Finally, humanitarian access to the military zones, already heavily restricted, was aggravated in July when the Government expelled the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières-Holland from the region.

The Government did not necessarily accept the evidence presented in the United Nations report, but it nevertheless agreed to implement its recommendations, in particular on commercial trade and food aid. After further negotiations, they have now allowed the United Nations to set up offices in two locations within the military zones, namely Kebri Dahar and Degehabur. Eighteen non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have now been cleared to work in the military area to deliver much-needed humanitarian assistance.

Against that background, I visited Jijiga, the regional capital, and Kebri Dahar. I talked to the local authorities, and to United Nations and NGO humanitarian workers. I saw briefly a food distribution in Kebri Dahar, which might have been particularly staged for my visit. I was also able to look into the local market, where food was on sale, but at prices that seemed well above those in previous years, although food prices have increased significantly in Ethiopia generally in recent months.

In Addis Ababa, I talked to members of the Government, from Prime Minister Meles Zenawi down, about their views of the situation and ways to improve the humanitarian response. We also discussed reported human rights violations.

The Government's view, in brief, is that claims of major humanitarian problems are much exaggerated, that there are now no restrictions on commercial trade

and that there should be no difficulty in getting food aid to the people, including in the remote areas. We had to agree to disagree about the analysis of the crisis, although we will try to reconcile our respective data. But the Prime Minister helpfully confirmed that the Government would respond as if our worst-case scenario predictions were justified. He assured me that all necessary steps would be taken to avoid any famine.

On that basis, I urged him and the Deputy Prime Minister to allow full humanitarian access to the region, to speed up relief efforts, to enable more NGOs to operate within the military zone, to allow World Food Programme (WFP) trucks to move, in at least the safer areas, without military escorts, to allow government officials to resume their normal work, particularly in the health area, and to establish a high-level regular coordination forum between the Government and the humanitarian community.

There has not yet been agreement to all those requests, but I believe we have made some progress, including in terms of access and presence on the ground. Nevertheless, there is still a huge amount to do.

My own initial assessment of the crisis, on the basis of my visit and the contacts I was able to make, is that, while there may not currently be a humanitarian catastrophe, there are strong reasons to believe that such a catastrophe could occur in the next few months if all the necessary action to avert it is not taken. I should nevertheless make clear that no one from outside has yet been able to visit many of the remote rural areas, where the conflict has been worst. The situation could well be even more serious there.

We have all also seen and heard worrying reports about the human rights situation. The United Nations report recommended that the Government allow them to be investigated independently. I heard, indirectly, further reports of the same alarming kind while I was in the region. I took these up with the Government and urged them again to allow independent investigation and monitoring. They contested the reports but said they would be responding to them. I take this opportunity to repeat the plea that any local investigation should also involve independent outside experts. Otherwise, suspicions about dreadful things happening, involving all sides, cannot be dispelled.

In sum, the commitments of the Ethiopian Government, at the most senior level, to do everything necessary to make sure there is no famine give me a measure of hope. But I repeat that, if all the steps I have talked about are not taken, a disaster could unfold with frightening speed. For my part, I will continue to monitor this very closely and am ready to authorize more resources, for example from the Central Emergency Respond Fund, if that should be needed.

In the longer term, a return of peace and stability to the region would obviously be the best guarantee against disaster. I hope some kind of inclusive political dialogue to that end can start again soon. Meanwhile, I encourage the international community, not least members of the Security Council, to monitor the situation and to encourage political progress, in the light of the potential implications for peace and security in an increasingly explosive region.

Allow me to turn to the Sudan. My objective was to review the implementation of the Joint Communiqué between the Government of Sudan and the United Nations on Facilitation of Humanitarian Activities in Darfur, signed just after my first visit in March, and to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground. Currently, some 13,300 relief workers in Darfur are assisting 4.2 million people affected by the conflict, including almost 2.4 million displaced persons. But the situation is gradually deteriorating, and the operation in many ways remains fragile. My serious concerns include restrictions on access, violence affecting civilians and aid workers and respect of humanitarian principles by all parties to the conflict.

The Joint Communiqué has helped to reduce some of the bureaucratic obstacles hindering relief agencies. While this progress is welcome, significant problems still remain. There are continuing challenges regarding the implementation of some of the fast-track procedures, such as the issue of initial entry visas, exit visas for NGO workers and the release of equipment from customs. Nevertheless, I welcome the clear assurances I was given about the renewal of the fast-track procedures when they expire on 31 January 2008. In my meetings with Government representatives, I also stressed the importance of strengthening trust and confidence between the Government and the humanitarian community and ensuring full implementation of the Joint Communiqué in spirit as well as in letter.

Clashes between signatories and non-signatories of the Darfur Peace Agreement, aerial bombardments,

militia and inter-tribal clashes, banditry and general lawlessness continue to have a major impact on the population of Darfur. This year, nearly 280,000 more civilians have been forced to flee violence, many for the second or third time, to already overflowing camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), or to seek refuge in the bush. The consequences are significant; they include increases in malnutrition in several areas of Darfur.

There are other grim consequences too. In Adilla, an area in eastern South Darfur not far from Haskanita in North Darfur, where fighting started in August, one medical clinic reported 183 cases of sexually transmitted infections in September, including 40 cases in children under five years old. Some of the survivors were in the camp I visited near Ed Daein in South Darfur, although heavy security prevented me from speaking to them privately.

Continuing hostilities and the unpredictable security situation are the greatest obstacles to access. But there is also justified concern over the refusal of national authorities to allow access in certain areas, for example Adilla and Jebel Marra, where there are tens of thousands of civilians in severe need. Access to some of the IDP camps near Nyala in South Darfur has, on occasion, also been restricted.

Meanwhile, attacks on humanitarian personnel continue at unprecedented levels. Since the start of the year, 128 humanitarian vehicles have been hijacked, 118 staff temporarily taken hostage, more than 59 personnel physically or sexually assaulted and 74 convoys ambushed and looted. Tragically, 12 relief workers have been killed. In other words, those who have come just to help continue to be attacked in an atmosphere of near-total impunity.

Those responsible for these attacks are often hard to identify with certainty. But they appear to come mainly from rebel groups and Sudan Liberation Army (SLA)/Minni Minawi elements. Hijackings and compound break-ins are also a growing phenomenon in and around the main towns such as Nyala and El Fasher, where the Government is clearly in control. In that context, I welcomed the pledge from a senior Government official to increase patrols in such areas.

During my visit, Government officials repeatedly suggested that some humanitarian staff in Darfur were engaged in inappropriate activities. It is important to emphasize, as I did, that monitoring and speaking up for the rights of civilians and respect for humanitarian law and principles are fundamental to humanitarian action and reflect the concerns of this Council. During my visit, I appealed to the Government to use the high-level Committee as a forum for discussion to address any concerns, rather than to take unilateral actions, such as the recent expulsion of the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) office in South Darfur, which we have strongly contested. Humanitarian workers are there to help the people of Sudan and to help the Government of Sudan fulfil its responsibility to protect its own citizens, not for any other reason.

The return or relocation of IDPs is clearly a very sensitive issue. Like the IDPs themselves, the United Nations and NGOs working in Darfur look forward eagerly to a time when peace is a reality and when people can return to their areas of origin in conditions of safety and dignity, or make the choice to settle elsewhere. In line with international principles and agreements between the United Nations and the Government of Sudan, return or resettlement must be voluntary — free of pressure or coercion — and may take place only after consultations with the displaced themselves and the humanitarian community. In several areas, such as Marla and Yassin in Southern Darfur, and near Kutum in Northern Darfur, some voluntary return has occurred with the support of the humanitarian community. However, the necessary conditions for large-scale returns across Darfur do not yet exist, in my view and in the view of most outside observers, and to encourage return without security would endanger the lives of those who have already suffered too much. The United Nations, nevertheless, stands ready to work on returns with the Government and the displaced, as and when the conditions are appropriate.

Another key current issue in some of the more volatile camps, such as Kalma, near Nyala, is the presence of arms, which jeopardizes the safety of all concerned. I call on all parties to respect the civilian character of the camps. Recent constructive discussions between the Government of Southern Darfur and the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) about how to tackle the problems in Kalma camp are welcome and show the way forward.

The reality is that the need for humanitarian assistance in Darfur continues to grow. The 2008 workplan for the Sudan will appeal for $825 million

for humanitarian needs and for some early recovery activities in Darfur. In this context, let me repeat how much I would like to see the moratorium on restrictions and the fast-track procedures formally extended soon, since that would give all partners of the workplan, particularly NGOs, the certainty they need to plan ahead for 2008.

I have detailed these challenges to underscore that, despite its scale and relative success in sustaining millions and saving hundreds of thousands of lives, the humanitarian operation in Darfur is increasingly fragile. Morale among the humanitarian aid workers is low — lower than when I was last there in March — because of the multiple pressures I have mentioned. The political context is changing as rebel groups jockey for position and some Arab groups flex their muscles in new ways. The Government of Sudan, and all the armed groups, have a particular responsibility to avoid any unravelling of the humanitarian operation.

The main requirement, as we all know, is an inclusive peace agreement as soon as possible, reinforced by a peacekeeping force capable of monitoring the peace and ensuring the protection of civilians. But, while it is right to ensure a focus on the justice, political and peacekeeping tracks, the humanitarian operation itself could soon be in real jeopardy. It requires close monitoring from all concerned, not least this Council.

Finally, I have talked only about Darfur today. I did not visit Juba in the South on this mission. But there are significant continuing humanitarian operations in the South, and I take this opportunity to underline as forcefully as I can the fundamental importance of the North-South relationship, including for Darfur.

The last leg of my mission was a brief visit to Somalia, for the second time this year. I visited the area where a large proportion of those fleeing the capital have sought shelter. The United Nations estimates that more than half of the city has been emptied of its citizens, or 600,000 people altogether. Some 230,000 of them are now living along a 15-kilometre stretch of road between Mogadishu and the small town of Afgooye, probably the single largest IDP gathering in the world today.

I drove along most of this road and was able to see the extent of the over 70 IDP camps. Some have mushroomed in the past month. Others already have signboards advertising the name of the settlement and even the phone number, as if they expected to last. All the people I spoke to in the camps had fled the violence and intimidation that have made life in Mogadishu so unliveable. Some spoke to me of snipers fuelling panic in the streets. Many left with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

I visited a recent IDP settlement called Gutale, hosting about 600 families. The shelters were rudimentary, literally branches and cloth, and people's distress was clear. Nevertheless, an active relief response is now visible. Clean water is being trucked in; distributions of plastic sheeting are providing cover; the building of much-needed latrines and sanitation facilities is making progress. A five-day vaccination campaign for all of the children in the areas was well under way while I was there, and the World Food Programme had recently distributed food to 180,000 people.

I also visited the largest camp, known as Dr. Hawa Abdi, named after the doctor who has run a clinic there for the past 16 years, with more than 4,000 families or 25,000. Dr. Hawa Abdi runs a treatment centre there, which also hosts a therapeutic feeding centre run by Médecins Sans Frontières Switzerland. Every one of the 60 beds for malnourished children was being used, reflecting the alarming malnutrition rates. Dr. Abdi herself is an inspiring example of the dedication of some Somali citizens to relieve the suffering of their own people.

Virtually all these relief activities are implemented through local partners or national staff of international NGOs and United Nations agencies. With very few exceptions, international humanitarian staff do not feel able to work in the area because of security concerns, including extortion and violence at checkpoints and roadblocks. Our convoy had the benefit of heavy security arrangements. Armed elements were nevertheless clearly visible along the road. The prevailing atmosphere of mistrust between the authorities and the international organizations, and the resulting incidents and administrative difficulties, have not helped.

Let me, therefore, pay warm tribute to the humanitarian workers who operate in such a hostile environment, particularly national staff, who have often themselves now been displaced from Mogadishu with their own families.

While a decent relief effort may now be under way in the area I visited, there are still huge challenges. I am particularly concerned about the seriousness of the situation of the other hundreds of thousands of people displaced from Mogadishu, scattered over inaccessible areas in South and Central Somalia. I am even more concerned about those still in Mogadishu. A World Food Programme programme to serve up to 50,000 prepared meals a day to the most vulnerable has just started. However, such efforts are far from enough to cover the needs — particularly if violence and displacement continue at their current pace.

In Baidoa, I met the newly appointed Prime Minister, Nur Hassan Hussein, former President of the Somali Red Crescent Society. Mr. Hussein shared my concern about the severity of the humanitarian crisis and agreed that there should be no distinction among vulnerable people when it comes to the right to be assisted. He also promised the Government's full help. We discussed ways to overcome the mistrust between the Transitional Federal Government and the international humanitarian organizations, and the priority to be given to the protection of civilians, particularly in Mogadishu. He made it clear that the humanitarian crisis, security and political reconciliation were his three top priorities. We need to see that translated into action.

Meanwhile, we need to step up our relief efforts further. There are some 1.5 million people in need altogether. I, therefore, appeal to the donor community, the agencies and the international NGOs to increase their presence and the resources dedicated to Somalia. In 2007, we requested $300 million for the Consolidated Appeal for Somalia. In 2008, that figure will rise to at least $400 million.

But a robust humanitarian response cannot make up for the absence of desperately needed political and security progress. I fear, on the basis of what I heard, that increasingly terrible things are now happening in Mogadishu, as it descends into the nightmare of urban guerrilla warfare and reciprocal atrocities. Respect for international humanitarian law is essential, now more than ever, a point I raised strongly with both the Ethiopian and Somali Governments, but which applies just as much to those fighting them.

The international community has the responsibility not to abandon the Somali people to their fate, but to help all concerned to find a way out of the traps they find themselves in. There is no simple solution, certainly not a military one. Peacekeeping forces need a peace to keep, above all in this troubled country. But lack of high-level attention is not an option for Somalia, any more than it is for Darfur.

I am extremely concerned by the humanitarian situation in all three areas I visited. They are a reflection of the huge and linked political and security challenges that this region now faces and which must be a major concern for this Council.

The President: I thank Mr. Holmes for his very comprehensive briefing.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): Let me thank Ambassador Holmes for briefing us this morning. I must say that the Under-Secretary-General has been very courageous in shining light on areas of the world that are facing great difficulty and we truly appreciate that.

The region that Mr. Holmes visited is the one that poses the biggest challenge at this stage for the international community. Beginning with Somalia, we are truly concerned about the situation in Somalia and often worried, because it does not seem to be getting any better. The Under-Secretary-General mentioned that there are currently 230,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are dispersed along a 15 kilometre stretch of road between Mogadishu and the town of Afgooye and have been left to fend for themselves. For that reason, we continue to hope that on another day we will revisit the request for the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations to speed up their assessment of whether it would be possible to deploy a peacekeeping operation to Somalia to assist the people of Somalia. The briefing by the Under-Secretary-General proves beyond a doubt that the situation is not improving at all, thus the international community cannot afford to leave the people of Somalia to fend for themselves.

As the Under-Secretary-General said, the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in inaccessible areas is now proving even more difficult than it has been and the continued weakness of the Transitional Federal Government does not help that situation. We truly hope that the Security Council will revisit the region of Somalia and working together with the Secretary-General, find a stronger solution.

We are pleased that the Under-Secretary-General again visited Darfur — another place that is a challenge to the international community. My delegation continues to underline that all of us truly need to work together — the Government of the Sudan, the African Union and the United Nations — in the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) as soon as possible, because without UNAMID on the ground the lives of the people in those camps is becoming more precarious by the day.

We also need to deploy UNAMID in order to address the safety of the humanitarian personnel, as the humanitarian personnel are clearly now at the mercy of the marauding rebels, who are hijacking cargo and attacking the workers, who are there to assist the people in the camps. We hope that with the deployment of UNAMID we will then have a force on the ground of sufficient strength that could begin not only to protect the people in the camps, but also to protect all of the people who are so important to the survival of the people in the camps.

Once again, we appreciate Mr. Holmes coming before us and we appreciate his ability to go to those areas that are still in great need of help and especially the fact that his briefing comes to us at Christmas time when everybody is thinking about those who have less than we do, and we very much appreciate his work.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation): We also are happy to welcome Mr. Holmes to the Security Council meeting today. We are grateful to him for his briefing thorough, as always, on the results of his trip to Ethiopia, the Sudan, Somalia and Kenya. We see the large amount of work he and the United Nations humanitarian agencies are doing under his leadership, and we very much appreciate that work. We believe its continuation is a very important factor in easing the humanitarian situation in the crisis regions, as well as a factor in promoting the political settlement process. We share the concern of the Secretariat regarding the complex humanitarian situation in the region under discussion.

With respect to Somalia, events of the past few months have once again lead to an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The military clashes and tensions that have arisen have undoubtedly had and continue to have a negative impact on the civilian population. We are concerned that access to humanitarian assistance for the stricken population is still encountering serious obstacles.

We believe it is important to continue the humanitarian work, first and foremost that taking place in Somalia under United Nations auspices. Of course, the security situation is constraining those efforts, but we are hopeful that the situation will improve. For that to occur, it is important that the peacekeeping operation of the African Union, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), be fully deployed. Of course, the African peacekeepers must continue to receive the necessary support.

I fully agree that the Security Council must continue to follow events carefully in Somalia and to provide support to the process of stabilizing and normalizing life in that country, a process which unfortunately continues to face serious problems. We believe that we will, in due course, receive further information from the Secretary-General as to how the United Nations can be more effective in its efforts to improve the situation in Somalia, first and foremost by strengthening its peacekeeping efforts. Of course, we will be prepared to consider such proposals, taking into account developments on the ground in terms of security and in the political and humanitarian areas.

Unfortunately, the humanitarian situation is very complex in the Sudan, particularly in Darfur. While the information that we have received indicates some recent progress, the overall situation remains alarming.

We highly appreciate the efforts of United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations in the Sudan, which are ensuring the delivery of humanitarian supplies and supporting the civilian population in very complex circumstances. As we have recently discussed this situation in the Security Council several times and will continue to do so, I will not discuss it in depth. I would only reiterate that the peacekeeping efforts of the African Union (AU) — and, we hope, the future joint efforts by the AU and the United Nations in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) — should help to improve the humanitarian situation. That is a very important aspect of the peacekeepers' mandate, and we will continue to do our utmost in the Security Council to resolve all remaining problems that could prevent full deployment of UNAMID. We are convinced that, since the dialogue with the Government of the Sudan must continue, those outstanding issues must be

resolved very swiftly, so that United Nations and AU peacekeepers can establish their authority in the very near future — in early 2008, if possible.

Of course, the humanitarian situations in the hotspots to which Mr. Holmes referred, particularly Somalia and the Sudan, have their own specific characteristics. But one thing that they have in common is the fact that they cannot be resolved without substantial progress being made towards a political settlement. In turn, such a settlement would help to improve the security situation.

These are all related aspects that we have discussed repeatedly, but we continue to believe that they work together. Accordingly, the international community and the United Nations, including the Security Council, must make robust efforts in all three areas — political, peacekeeping and humanitarian. At the same time, we must not forget about establishing infrastructure and creating the conditions necessary for post-conflict restoration and recovery in this devastated region.

We believe that, in order to facilitate the Council's work, it would be useful for Mr. Holmes to provide us with regular assessments of the humanitarian situation. I should like to reiterate that the humanitarian area is an important component in our work; it is an aspect that we will be considering on a daily basis.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to thank Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for the information provided regarding his recent trip. I should like to make a few comments on his presentation.

With regard to Somalia, we are concerned at the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the attacks against the civilian population, as well as the acts of intimidation and the human rights violations carried out by various parties. It is also alarming that access to humanitarian aid is at its lowest point ever and that humanitarian workers are being threatened and harassed, which is preventing aid from reaching the people most in need. We believe it is important that the Transitional Federal Institutions and all parties to the conflict promise to guarantee access for humanitarian workers and to provide transport authorizations so that the aid can reach those for whom it is intended.

That deterioration on the ground further jeopardizes the possibilities that a solution can be found to Somalia's long-standing crisis. It is urgent that the international community and the Security Council assess how we are dealing with the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. Without security or access to humanitarian assistance, all the political efforts being made for reconciliation and stability in the country could come to naught.

Furthermore, we regret the continued deterioration of the security conditions and the humanitarian situation in Darfur. We now need to ensure the protection of the civilian population, and it is essential that all parties declare a cessation of hostilities. In addition, all parties must be required to permit full and unhindered humanitarian access in order to improve the flow of aid to the displaced population.

The briefing reminded us of the factors contributing to the continued worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur and illustrated the many threats faced by internally displaced persons, whose number had increased to 250,000 as of September 2007.

The scope and the characteristics of the humanitarian tragedy in Darfur are a constant appeal to the conscience of the international community. The millions of human beings who are clinging to life cannot be helped through a gradual approach or political considerations; what is required is a great collective resolve to urgently mobilize all the assistance needed to save lives and to respect the human dignity of the displaced persons. We appreciate the 2008 workplan for the Sudan, to be presented on 11 September next year to international donors; it will be very important for those most in need in Darfur. The Sudanese authorities must be prepared to cooperate fully with the United Nations system and the international community to make progress in stabilizing Darfur.

We appreciate the fact that Mr. Holmes visited the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, where the humanitarian situation has become worrisome. We understand that his visit has made it possible to identify the most pressing humanitarian needs and that he was able to request the Ethiopian authorities to conduct an investigation into the reports of human rights violations in that area.

Finally, I wish to thank Mr. Holmes for his frank and clear presentation, which reflects the tragedy and the insecurity being suffered by thousands of people who are the victims of humanitarian crises. I should like to assure him of Peru's unwavering support for his work and for the resolute efforts of his Office to assist the civilians, including displaced persons and refugees, affected by those crises.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his briefing on several areas of Africa: Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan.

At the moment, the humanitarian situations in some parts of Africa have aroused widespread concern in the international community. China is deeply sympathetic and concerned about the problems faced by the countries and peoples affected. We appeal to the international community to make a joint effort to provide and increase humanitarian assistance to help those countries and peoples overcome their crises.

Africa faces many varied and complex humanitarian difficulties. For example, in the Darfur region of the Sudan the causes of the humanitarian difficulties include the political crisis triggered by traditional ethnic and tribal discord, the long-term economic underdevelopment that has led to extreme poverty, and conflicts resulting from rivalry over such local resources as water and pastures. Turning to the Horn of Africa, the main cause of the humanitarian tragedy in Somalia is the large-scale armed conflict in that country and the resulting large numbers of civilian casualties and internally displaced persons.

Given the diverse causes of humanitarian crises, the international community's response should be differentiated and well targeted. First and foremost, a peaceful environment is necessary to resolve such crises. It is of the utmost urgency to curb armed conflicts in the areas concerned, to achieve breakthroughs in the respective political processes and to eliminate the political causes for the deterioration of the situations. Only in that way can we lay the groundwork for easing the humanitarian crises.

Secondly, it is necessary to promote harmony and unity in the countries and regions concerned, as well as to achieve reconciliation and cooperation between tribes and ethnic groups. The existence of humanitarian crises is ultimately a question of development. The international community should attach importance to the socio-economic development of these African regions, take a long-term view and formulate a well-targeted development strategy at an early date. Only when local livelihoods are improved can conflicts gradually be eliminated and the harmonious development of ethnic groups and tribes, as well as harmony between man and nature, be ensured.

In sum, easing and ultimately resolving the humanitarian crises in parts of Africa requires identifying the remedies suited to the problems, tackling symptoms and underlying causes, talking less and doing more and avoiding the politicization of humanitarian issues or reducing humanitarian issues to a tool to exert political pressure.

China commends the United Nations and other international humanitarian relief organizations for their tireless efforts throughout the years. We appeal to all those concerned to leverage their advantages, pool their strengths and jointly resolve humanitarian crises in Africa. Donors should faithfully fulfil their pledges of assistance and make up shortfalls in funding humanitarian assistance. In providing assistance, the international community should also strengthen coordination and cooperation with the Governments of the countries concerned and do a good job in a worthy cause in order to achieve a win-win situation.

I should also like to say that, compared with the intense international attention on the issue of Darfur, the humanitarian crisis in Somalia has received less attention. China urges the international community to attach the same importance to Somalia. We appeal to additional international relief agencies to undertake activities in Somalia.

The Government and the people of China have consistently attached great importance to the humanitarian situation in Africa. Along with the rest of international community, we have increased our assistance to a number of countries in the continent. In recent years, my Government, within the limits of its capabilities, has in various ways actively participated in international humanitarian efforts for Africa.

With regard to Darfur, China not only attaches importance to the political and peacekeeping process, but has also provided Darfur and the African Union Mission in the Sudan with considerable humanitarian assistance and donations. Chinese enterprises have drilled scores of wells in Darfur and have begun a large-scale water supply project to ease the drinking

water problems of the local population. China's departments have also donated teaching equipment in order to support Darfur's education sector.

We have also played an active role in easing the humanitarian crisis in Somalia.

China's efforts have garnered the praise and recognition of the countries and peoples of Africa and of the international community.

As in the past, China will actively participate in the efforts of the international community to which I have referred.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): First of all, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his timely briefing on the humanitarian situations in Somalia and Darfur. His observations are, of course, alarming. They underline the need for more active and systematic efforts by all stakeholders to address the problems in those two areas. We fully agree with Mr. Holmes that the return of peace and stability to those areas is the best guarantee against the emerging disaster.

In the meanwhile, we believe more needs to be done to ease the suffering of civilians trapped in the armed conflicts in Darfur and Somalia. In that regard, we commend the tireless efforts and work of United Nations agencies and several non-governmental organizations that are trying to improve the desperate humanitarian situation and to avert catastrophe.

We would like to reiterate here that the protection of civilians, especially the most vulnerable groups, such as women and children, must be a permanent priority for the Security Council.

Turning to Darfur, we are concerned that, despite all the recent efforts on the political and peacekeeping tracks, the overall security situation continues to deteriorate, with an enormously negative impact on the situation of civilians. We continue to believe that ensuring humanitarian assistance for all of the 4.2 million people affected in Darfur is essential. In that regard, we note with deep concern that there is only very limited or no access for humanitarian workers in large areas of Darfur.

Yesterday, the Council heard from the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (see S/PV.5789), and last week from Special Envoy Eliasson (see S/PV.5784), that the situation in camps for internally displaced persons is very worrying, with violence and insecurity on the rise. It is appalling that people in camps face very difficult choices: either to stay in areas under attack or to move to other places, where living conditions are very difficult.

We are very concerned that we continue to see more deliberate attacks against civilians and relief workers, ongoing displacements, vehicle hijackings, abductions, denial of humanitarian access, bureaucratic obstacles and the expulsion of aid workers from the Sudan. Those are just a few examples of the challenges that relief workers have to face while working in the Sudan. In that regard, Slovakia would like to emphasize the need for full respect for humanitarian principles, in order for there to be a more effective and efficient response to the crisis.

We are encouraged by the signing of the Joint Communiqué between the United Nations and the Sudan earlier this year. We note that there has been certain progress in its implementation, as reported by Mr. Holmes. But clearly, we agree with Mr. Holmes that more needs to be done to address the remaining problems. We believe that the Government of the Sudan should redouble its efforts to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Finally, we believe that the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), as was stressed by previous speakers, must be accelerated to prevent the situation from becoming a catastrophe. We call on the Government of the Sudan to facilitate this process.

Briefly, we are greatly concerned about the growing humanitarian crisis in Somalia and the ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. We call on the Somali Government to immediately remove the restrictions on humanitarian flights and shipments, and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We are also concerned about the difficult situation along the Somali coast, which has been seriously affected by an increasing number of incidents of piracy. In this regard, we commend the French Navy escort for its facilitation of the delivery of World Food Programme shipments.

In conclusion, we express our support for some of Mr. Holmes's suggestions, specifically that there should be more monitoring and more close attention paid to issues of human rights violations, as well as the need for independent investigations of those cases.

Mr. Suescum (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First and foremost, we would like to thank Mr. Holmes for his briefing on his visit to Ethiopia, the Sudan and Somalia. We would also like to congratulate the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for its efforts to help those that need it the most.

Mr. Holmes's visit to the region of Ogaden in Ethiopia has uncovered the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, which is a result of conflict between the Ethiopian military and the Ogaden National Liberation Front. We call on the Ethiopian Government to investigate the violations of human rights, which presumably have been committed by Ethiopian soldiers, in conformity with the instruments of applicable humanitarian rights. We also call on the parties to the conflict to promptly reinitiate the process of dialogue.

Having said that, we are very hopeful that the Ethiopian Government will soon allow the presence of humanitarian assistance organizations in that area. That decision, together with operations on the ground to provide medicines, water and sanitation, will help to meet many of the needs of the affected populations.

Also noteworthy is the progress made in the consultations with the regional and national Governments to find alternatives for solving the humanitarian crisis in the region. This is critical if we are to prevent the situation from deteriorating into the kind of disaster indicated by Mr. Holmes, which must be avoided.

In Darfur, Mr. Holmes's visit confirms the growing danger and difficulties that are being faced by the inhabitants of the region. The number of internally displaced persons continues to increase. Aid organizations are not able to provide an effective response to the humanitarian needs because of bureaucratic and security obstacles. All of this makes the deployment of the Hybrid Force even more urgent. We must do everything within our power to overcome these administrative difficulties. Of equal or even greater importance, is the ongoing process in Sirte. That process, if it is to be genuinely effective, will require the participation of all parties to the conflict.

In Somalia, the humanitarian situation is probably the most devastating situation that we currently have before us with more than 1 million displaced persons. Reports indicate — and Mr. Holmes confirmed this today — that the international community and relief organizations have made important progress in humanitarian coverage, but a lot still remains to be done.

We are encouraged at the information provided by Mr. Holmes that the Prime Minister, Nur Hassan Hussein, assures us that he will treat as a matter of priority the critical humanitarian, political and security situation. On a more strategic level, the complexity and the magnitude of the situation in Somalia sometimes seems to go beyond the capacity of this Organization to deal with effectively. However, that is no reason for the international community to stop trying to find a solution to this difficult situation, which necessarily requires strengthening the African Union Mission in Somalia.

In those three conflicts, our failure to take action, could affect the credibility of the Organization and, in particular, that of this Council. Therefore, we must act energetically to face those challenges.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I, too, would like to join others in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing. I think his visit to the region was very welcome, and it is very good to have a first-hand assessment from him of these situations of concern.

I will discuss the Sudan first. We share the Under-Secretary-General's concern about the humanitarian situation there. The United Kingdom has been a longstanding friend of the Sudanese people, and we have a longstanding commitment to helping them. In the past five years, we have provided over $660 million in assistance. That makes us the world's second largest bilateral donor.

We are very concerned about the humanitarian situation, in particular the increased insecurity within the camps and the unprecedented levels of violence against humanitarian workers. It seems that much of this is being carried out by rebel elements. The briefing by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, which the Council heard yesterday, also made this point and brought this issue home. We are very interested in what the Under-Secretary-General said about the situation in the Kalma camp, which has seen thousands flee to nearby camps and seven humanitarian workers killed in October. This is obviously unacceptable.

We note the commitments of the African Union, the United Nations and the Government of the Sudan to

set up a commission to review the situation. The Under-Secretary-General's comments about the prospects for taking this forward were welcome. I simply wish to highlight that we share the concerns of the United Nations and other speakers regarding the expulsion of the head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in south Darfur. It is particularly regrettable that people whose sole role and commitment is towards helping to relieve humanitarian suffering are treated in that way.

We noted the Government of the Sudan's commitment with respect to bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian access. Such commitments now need to be translated into action, and we look to the Government of the Sudan to make an early announcement of this extension.

It is disappointing that the high-level committee has not met since October. I would like to use this occasion to call upon the Government of the Sudan to respect and fully implement its commitments under the Joint Communiqué, and to review issues of concern through the established channels.

As other speakers have said today, an effective African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) is critical for delivering peace and security. The United Kingdom continues to press all parties, but particularly the Government of the Sudan, to ensure prompt deployment of an effective force. This will be a critical part of enabling safe and sustainable returns and a safe and secure environment.

I would like to speak now on Somalia. We share the concerns of others expressed today, and we support the efforts of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to address problems on the ground. We would like to use this occasion to remind the Transitional Federal Government that getting humanitarian relief to people in need is their responsibility. We would like to see action taken by all, including the Government, to reduce checkpoints, harassment, tax levies and the use of humanitarian relief for political purposes. Respect for international humanitarian law by all sides is an essential component of that.

We agree with the Under-Secretary-General that the Security Council needs to monitor the situation carefully and that we should continue to remind all parties of their obligations, and I take this opportunity to do so. We look forward to continued briefings, including by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Mr. Ould-Abdallah, who will be here on 17 December, and we will look to the Secretariat for advice on how we might resolve some of the problems that have been highlighted today.

We also agree that the international community more broadly needs to shoulder its responsibilities and give what assistance it can to the people of Somalia. The United Kingdom is the third-largest bilateral donor to Somalia, and we have provided support for a range of programmes that strengthen, for example, governance and the rule of law or emergency health services. Ultimately, however, progress depends on political reconciliation and making progress on security.

Finally, I would like to turn to Ethiopia and the Ogaden. The Under-Secretary-General's visit there was timely. It was a useful opportunity to assess developments after the United Nations mission's report in September. It is important that the Government now work with the United Nations to address humanitarian and other concerns, particularly on aid and access. It is welcome that there is an agreement to allow the United Nations to set up offices in the military zone, and we endorse the request and messages that the Under-Secretary-General made to the Ethiopian authorities. We particularly endorse his suggestion that the international community, including the Council, continue to monitor this situation closely.

The United Kingdom welcomes the idea of a high-level forum on the region, and we hope that the Resident Coordinator might be able to fix a date for the first meeting as soon as possible. We also welcome the Ethiopian Government's readiness to have monthly meetings with non-governmental organizations. We believe that that could be a useful mechanism for them to raise continuing problems that they have in the region.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): I would like to join others in thanking the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. John Holmes, for his briefing on his recent mission to Ethiopia, the Sudan and Somalia.

The humanitarian situation in those regions today requires our utmost attention and priority. Inhabitants and refugee populations are forced to cope with exceedingly difficult conditions in an inhospitable environment, the legacy of conflict and environmental degradation. The scale of humanitarian needs in these

regions is overwhelming, with varying degrees of calamity and challenge. Mr. Holmes's briefing also highlights the varying degrees of success in local, national and international efforts in these regions.

The humanitarian situation in Ethiopia, particularly in the Ogaden region, remains a source of concern. Civilian casualties caused by the counterinsurgency are deeply regrettable and must be avoided. Indeed, avoiding civilian casualties in the process of seeking to stabilize the region should be a priority. We welcome continued discussions between the Secretariat and the Government of Ethiopia on ways in which the United Nations could support the Government in its efforts to provide relief to affected populations.

In the Darfur region of the Sudan, we remain concerned with the violence and displacement that continue unabated. It is troubling that in October alone more than 30,000 civilians were displaced by clashes between the parties in Darfur, including among Darfur movements themselves, and that humanitarian workers continue to be assaulted, harassed and even killed.

We find it unacceptable that vehicles belonging to the humanitarian community continue to be carjacked — 128 this year and 13 in November alone — and used, directly or indirectly, to prolong the conflict. These carjackings and other kinds of banditry have further hampered humanitarian efforts for the people of Darfur.

We urge all sides to cooperate with the United Nations and other actors engaged in humanitarian efforts in order to contribute to stability on the ground at this perilous time. We note that the Joint Communiqué between the Government of the Sudan and the Secretariat has proved to be a good mechanism for addressing humanitarian concerns, particularly those which relate to bureaucratic issues. We support continued constructive dialogue with the Sudanese Government in order to ensure that the people of Darfur receive the assistance they need.

We are also of the view that internally displaced persons in Darfur should only return to their homes voluntarily and under safe conditions. It is indeed desirable that people be able to return to their places of origin and resume their normal lives as soon as possible.

With regard to Somalia, we deeply regret that that country is facing one of its worst humanitarian crises in years. The humanitarian situation is, in many ways, worse than that in Darfur, due to the inability to reach those in need with humanitarian supplies and aid. We should strive to improve the situation through our aid efforts to the extent possible. I echo appeals to all those with guns, whether they be Government, insurgent or Ethiopian troops, to cease indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks affecting civilians.

As we move forward with our humanitarian efforts, we are all reminded that these conflicts are the result of the inability to resolve political problems without the use of force. As has been said before, humanitarian assistance is like a Band-Aid over an open wound. We need to heal the wound, and a Band-Aid alone is insufficient to do so.

Finally, I should underline the importance of observing the international principles of humanitarian assistance, which include humanity, neutrality and impartiality, as well as full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for briefing the Council on his latest trip to East Africa. His visit and his report today help highlight three critical situations facing the international community.

On the Sudan, the United States remains deeply committed to ending violence in Darfur through a political settlement, providing critical humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations and supporting the rapid deployment of the United Nations-African Union hybrid peacekeeping operation, as authorized in resolution 1769 (2007). We further support a peaceful, unified and democratic Sudan within the framework of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and we call for full implementation of all aspects of that Agreement. Secretary Rice travelled to Addis Ababa this week to lead a Sudan ministerial meeting with representatives from the Sudan, neighbouring African countries and the African Union and United Nations Special Representatives for Sudan.

A viable political process and the deployment of a robust United Nations-African Union hybrid peacekeeping force are critical to improving the humanitarian situation in Darfur. We urge all groups to support an accelerated political process led by the United Nations and the African Union and a lasting

ceasefire on the ground. We encourage all the rebel movements to set aside their differences and join together to better represent the people of Darfur. We call on all invited individuals and movements to attend the next round of negotiations. We urge the inclusion in the peace talks of traditional leaders from Darfur, women's groups, local non-governmental organizations and leaders from internally displaced persons camps. The participation of local society is absolutely vital to the success of the talks.

We call on the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations to rapidly advance of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) deployment. In this context, we urge the Government of the Sudan to approve without delay the full list of troop-contributing countries chosen by the United Nations and the African Union, and to meet its commitment to accept peacekeepers into Darfur and to provide them with the necessary visas, flight clearances and access to land and water, in order that they may successfully carry out their mission.

The United States is extremely disappointed by the Sudanese Government's expulsion from South Darfur of the head of the Nyala office of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Wael al-Haj-Ibrahim. We welcome recent discussions between the Government of the Sudan and Under-Secretary-General Holmes on the extension of the moratorium on humanitarian restrictions. The moratorium is critical to reducing obstacles faced by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Darfur.

As for Somalia, the United States is also deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation there. The increase in violence in the capital has resulted in thousands of additional internally displaced persons (IDPs), including the estimated 230,000 displaced persons that Mr. Holmes witnessed along a 15-kilometre stretch of road outside Mogadishu.

We take note that Under-Secretary-General Holmes met with newly appointed Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein and welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to placing humanitarian response high on his agenda.

We applaud the United Nations and NGO efforts to operate in very dangerous circumstances in Somalia. We are concerned that these efforts remain hampered by insecurity, roadblocks and inter-clan conflict, and we reiterate our call on all parties to facilitate access for the delivery of life-saving humanitarian aid to those in need.

Ultimately, the return of lasting peace and stability in Somalia, including an end to the long-standing humanitarian emergency, can only be achieved through a comprehensive political solution based on the Transitional Federal Charter. The United States continues to support the deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia to achieve this objective. We also reiterate the need for robust contingency planning by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to prepare for the possible transition to a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Somalia.

Finally, on Ethiopia, we would like to join others in drawing attention to the humanitarian situation in the Ogaden. We urge the Ethiopian Government to open commercial trade routes to the Somali Region to prevent the humanitarian crisis from deepening, and we call on the Government to continue to work with the international community to ensure access to populations in need of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Okio (Congo) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank Ambassador Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordination, for his accurate briefing, which brings us to the heart of the tragedy that is affecting the three countries that he visited. The futures of those countries depends, more than ever before, on the constructive engagement of the international community. In that region, as has been stressed so many times before, the various situations are so closely interlinked that successes in one country could be ruined by the failure — or negligence — in another.

My delegation would like to express its full support to Ambassador Holmes and his team and to encourage them to maintain useful contacts at the very highest level with the authorities of the countries visited. This will help to effectively accomplish the tasks at hand, including ensuring the protection of humanitarian workers, the provision of humanitarian assistance and, of course, the presence of humanitarian workers on the ground. In the view of my delegation, humanitarian workers are often the only lifeline for these desperate people. It is very important that our actions to help these workers be as robust as possible

and that we ensure that the countries in question protect them, in line with humanitarian law.

We were very concerned to hear about the situation in Somalia and in Darfur — to which my delegation has drawn the Council's attention on several occasions. With regard to Somalia, more than ever before, it is important that the efforts of the African Union (AU), through the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), be supported before it is too late. The current situation in Somalia poses so many risks for Somalia itself and for the whole of the subregion that it obliges the international community and the Security Council to act. As Ambassador Holmes has said, there can be no military solution to this conflict. We must therefore encourage the parties to try to find a political solution. In this context, there is no doubt that the first step must be to bring about a cessation of hostilities.

With regard to the Sudan, we can only reconfirm our previous position: the Government of the Sudan must fully cooperate with a view to the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID); sufficient pressure must be put on the rebel movements to bring them on board in the political process; and there must be unanimous and firm action by the Security Council — but, above all, balanced action. The humanitarian situation cannot be improved without the necessary political progress. Therefore, we need to create favourable conditions for the deployment of UNAMID without further delay.

We share the concerns expressed by Ambassador Holmes with regard to the danger of famine in Ethiopia, in particular in the Ogaden region. The same is true of the deterioration of the security situation in eastern Chad, where intense fighting is preventing humanitarian workers from gaining access to affected populations.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to reiterate its call to the international community to support the efforts of Ambassador Holmes, and, above all, to support the 2008 workplan to address the humanitarian needs and the economic development of the Sudan, and in particular of Darfur.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing and especially for his action. I would like to tell him that France fully supports his endeavours, which are particularly difficult.

My delegation is extremely concerned by the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation in Somalia. The number of people who have fled their homes has now reached 1 million, with 600,000 having been displaced since the beginning of the year — 200,000 in November alone.

We have three points to make. First, the indiscriminate attacks which gravely affect civilians are shocking. All parties must respect international humanitarian law, including the troops of the Transitional Federal Government and the Ethiopian forces. There is no need to recall that the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the Government.

Secondly, we are pleased that during the visit of the Under-Secretary-General the Somali Prime Minister acknowledged the neutral, impartial and independent nature of humanitarian assistance. We now are waiting for the Somali authorities to facilitate access by all populations to humanitarian assistance. In this context, we were relieved to learn today that, following Mr. Holmes's visit, the Federal Government has decided to once again authorize humanitarian operations in the south-eastern part of the country. Otherwise, 4,000 tons of food assistance, recently sent by the World Food Programme (WFP), would be lost.

My third message concerns the French operation to provide military escorts for vessels chartered by the WFP. This operation responds to a request by the WFP and has received the support of the Somali authorities. With pirate attacks off the Somali coast on the rise, this operation makes it possible to significantly improve humanitarian assistance in Somalia. An initial rotation was successful; others will follow in coming weeks. The French navy commitment will continue until 16 January. Once again, I would call on all of our partners subsequently to participate in these operations and to take over from France.

In conclusion on Somalia, we must continue to mobilize the international community and to make progress. As we see from massive displacements of populations in the last few weeks, the status quo is not acceptable. I wish to thank the United Kingdom for having organized yesterday's meeting of experts of Member States with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). I am pleased that the Council will discuss

Somalia again on 17 December, in the presence of Mr. Ould Abdallah, to address the complex of political, security and humanitarian dimensions of the crisis.

With respect to Ethiopia and Ogaden, I fully support the efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. My delegation is very concerned by information regarding attacks on civilians and the risk of widespread famine while the humanitarian situation is already in a state of deep deterioration. I call on the Government of Ethiopia to facilitate the free and unfettered access of humanitarian convoys to all populations in need, pursuant to international humanitarian law and clear and consistent procedures.

My delegation remains extremely troubled by the situation in Darfur. To claim that the situation has been stabilized is to misunderstand the facts. Some 280,000 people have left their homes in 2007. Violence against civilians, as well as the vagaries of the weather, have increased the rate of malnutrition among the people of Darfur, which had fallen from 2004 to 2006. The WFP now provides assistance to more than 3 million people, which amounts to 600,000 more than in June. Just as humanitarian organizations are having to consolidate their operations, deliberate attacks continue to be conducted against humanitarian personnel. Along with the insecurity they face, bureaucratic obstacles continue to be set up by local authorities. In that regard, France firmly condemns the recent expulsion of the head of the OCHA office in South Darfur.

Protecting civilians is the first duty of the Government of the Sudan, as it is of any Government. In that regard, I recall that, if it is effectively to fulfil its mandate of protecting civilians, the hybrid operation must enjoy the robust resources anticipated by the African Union and the United Nations. Humanitarian actors also need the cooperation of Khartoum. The Sudanese authorities undertook specific commitments when they signed the joint declaration in March. Those commitments were confirmed during the Secretary-General's visit in September.

We welcome the positive signal sent by the Sudanese authorities concerning the renewal of the moratorium on humanitarian access restrictions, which expires in late January. We need to ensure that that intention is translated into reality without delay. We must avoid any breakdown in the provision of food assistance.

Moreover and in conclusion, the information regarding forced relocation in southern Darfur is, as the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court told the Council yesterday, most troubling. The principle of voluntary return must be implemented, as it is the only way to ensure sustainable returns.

I wish to affirm once again that we fully support Mr. Holmes and his work on the ground.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to welcome Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and to thank him for his briefing to the Council on his recent visit to Somalia, Ethiopia and the Sudan, and his operational activities there in the areas of humanitarian relief.

We note that Mr. Holmes's previously expressed warning that we should be prepared for a very bad year from the humanitarian perspective was correct. That justifies the high importance he attaches to humanitarian relief efforts, prominent among which are the activities of the United Nations as the one Organization capable of confronting deteriorating humanitarian situations.

One humanitarian problem that has worsened, and which is being increasingly neglected by the international community, is the suffering of Somali civilians in the deteriorated security and political situation in the country. Most inhabitants of the capital are living in insecure conditions. Mr. Holmes has stated that more than 1.5 million people are internally displaced, suffering from a shortage of basic foodstuffs and facing the danger of starvation. If the international community is to provide assistance to Somalia, the situation there should be described frankly, explicitly and objectively so that no one can mistake it for a mere matter of food assistance or a difficult humanitarian situation. We must address the root causes that led to the current degradation of the situation in Somalia.

As everybody knows, one of the principal root causes is the fact that the country is under the yoke of occupation, while flagrant violations of international law and international humanitarian law, as well as war crimes committed against Somali civilians, continue unabated. Throughout the country, there are widespread extrajudicial executions and crimes against humanity in all their forms and manifestations, including rape, torture, violations of human rights, especially those of women and children, and the

flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

Making the situation even worse is the United Nations inability to respond to the call by the African Union for support to the Africa Union Military Observer Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which the Union has been unable fully to deploy until now. It is well known that the Security Council, following the adoption of resolution 1772 (2007), has been unable, regrettably, to respond to that call due to the reservations of some States members of the Council over providing the necessary logistic support to AMISON, as well as to the fact that foreign forces in Somalia are responsible for the deteriorating situation. Such forces should withdraw in order to calm the situation in that country, allowing AMISOM to assume the responsibilities entrusted to it through its acceptance by the Somali people. That is precisely what we called for in December 2006, when we presided over the Security Council, with a warning about just what we are seeing today.

As Mr. Holmes stated, we attach great importance to ongoing work to implement the joint communiqué agreed last March by the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations on the provision of humanitarian assistance. We also assign high priority to ongoing efforts to build confidence in the Sudanese Government to mitigate all the obstacles that might face humanitarian assistance in Darfur, prominent among which are the attacks undertaken by the rebel groups. We condemn all criminal acts perpetrated by the rebels, including threats and the targeting of humanitarian assistance convoys and peacekeepers. We reiterate our condemnation of the terrorist acts undertaken by the rebel groups in Darfur, following the most recent attacks on the headquarters of the African Union Mission in Sudan in Haskanita in early October of this year, which were also condemned by the Security Council in its presidential statement S/PRST/2007/35.

We further confirm the importance of deploying the hybrid operation to facilitate the political and humanitarian tracks, and call for deterrence of the rebel groups that have recently threatened the States that will participate in this operation. It is clearly critical and inevitable that we exert increasing pressure on those rebel groups.

There is no doubt that Africa is home to many of the world's most dire humanitarian situations. Armed conflict is one of the main reasons for the suffering of a huge number of civilians.

For my part, however, I would like to draw attention to the region I am from — the Middle East, which has its share of worsening humanitarian disasters. I refer in particular to the difficult humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, as one of the worst-ever cases in the world, especially in the Gaza Strip. That situation is unique in comparison to other disaster areas in the world, as the area is a huge prison due to the closures policies of the Government of Israel and its occupying forces.

There is no doubt that the availability of sufficient financial resources from donors is one of the most important means for coping with natural disasters and for providing assistance to civilian populations facing a very difficult and deteriorating humanitarian situation. Our humanitarian duty compels all of us to continue to provide that necessary financial assistance in order to continue emergency relief efforts. The State of Qatar is one of the leading States that actually did what it said it would, and provided quick financial and in-kind support for relief efforts and emergency assistance, in particular in the case of humanitarian disasters.

Mr. Verbeke (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. John Holmes, for his visit to East Africa and for presenting to us today a detailed report on his mission. His initiative comes at a time when the humanitarian situation in the region — especially, I think, in Somalia and Darfur — is not only of great concern, but also continues to deteriorate.

During the past weeks, and indeed the past few days, a number of viewpoints have been expressed by our Council with respect to developments in those two areas in crisis. It is obvious that the protection of civilian populations, access to humanitarian assistance and good cooperation in those two areas, in particular on the part of the local authorities and all parties to the conflict, remain a priority. But beyond those fundamental matters, I would also like to speak on a few points that merit our special attention.

The information that we have received concerning the security and humanitarian conditions in Somalia, in particular in Mogadishu, is very troubling,

and nothing seems to indicate that that trend will be reversed. More than 200,000 people have fled the capital since the end of October, that is, since just over a month ago. Almost 1.5 million people currently require international assistance in the country, as Mr. Holmes said. The gravity of the crisis has prompted dozens of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to launch an appeal to the international community.

Therefore the announcement on the day before yesterday, by the Transitional Federal Government concerning the closing of land and sea access points for humanitarian assistance in the area of Lower Shabelle and its subsequent retraction yesterday, show the need for better coordination between the Somalian authorities, as well as the usefulness of close contacts between the Government and the United Nations. Even if that situation is resolved in a positive manner, a prompt solution needs to be agreed with the Somalian authorities on the now-disproportionate problem of the perception of rights of passage through checkpoints.

In such a context, we can only welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General and his representative, Mr. Ould Abdallah, to ensure better coordination of international humanitarian assistance in Somalia and to support the recommendation of the Secretary-General to strengthen the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS). In that regard, while we recognize the scope of the tasks facing UNPOS, we must call for the issue of human rights in Somalia to be dealt with actively, particularly in order to promote the fight against impunity, which itself plays a role in the fight against violence.

Regarding the situation in Darfur, I note the statements that special envoys Jan Eliasson and Salim Ahmed Salim made during their visit to Egypt. According to those statements, the overall humanitarian situation remains extremely fragile, while the situation inside the camps is explosive.

Belgium also notes the resurgence of violence on the border with Chad, where fighting between the Government and rebel Chadian movements, which are operating out of Darfur in particular, has violently resumed since the end of November. That is one more element of insecurity in a region where the European-led peacekeeping force, EUFOR, is to be deployed as part of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT). We call on the Governments of Chad and the Sudan to meet their obligations under the Tripoli and Sirte agreements and, in particular, to put an end to the support of armed movements that destabilize the region. Those hostilities cannot become a new factor complicating the return of refugees.

As we know all too well, the deterioration of the security situation will hinder the distribution of humanitarian assistance. We would therefore earnestly request the Sudanese authorities to renew in good faith the moratorium and the Joint Communiqué between the Government of Sudan and the United Nations on Facilitation of Humanitarian Activities in Darfur, without which, by January 2008, hundreds of agents will be deprived of the necessary authorization to operate. In the same context, Belgium calls on the Government of the Sudan to put an end to the arbitrary expulsions of humanitarian workers and numerous bureaucratic and administrative difficulties concerning the conduct of those operations in general.

With respect to Ogaden, the commitment of the Ethiopian authorities should be encouraged. While the food situation seems to be improving a bit, major local disparities remain. As emphasized by Mr. Holmes, the needs of the population are significant and additional measures are required to facilitate access to aid, reduce barriers to mobility, increase the number of distribution points, strengthen humanitarian coordination and clarify the rules for registration and movement of NGOs so that they are in a position to work effectively.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. John Holmes, for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia, Darfur and Somalia.

My delegation is concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, where about 600,000 people require urgent humanitarian assistance. We therefore welcome the interagency assessment undertaken in August 2007, which resulted in the United Nations dispatching about 9,000 metric tons of food to the five military zones in the region. We also note that preparations are under way to deploy mobile help teams to the region, and it is our hope that the outstanding issues on the modalities of their work will be worked out soon, to enable them to respond to that serious humanitarian priority. The Ethiopian Government's initiative in accrediting more

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to work in the affected areas is commendable.

On the subject of Darfur, while we note that the signing of the Joint Communiqué in the first quarter of this year has helped to reduce some of the broad obstacles hindering relief agencies, the many bottlenecks must be addressed promptly to ensure that humanitarian principles and norms are fully respected, with assistance reaching all those in need. We have noted that some internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been able to return to their homes. That, however, is not on a large scale, because of the insecurity that persists in Darfur. The key concern for the Sudanese authorities should be to ensure that the necessary measures are put in place for IDPs to return voluntarily to their places of abode and normal lives, in a safe and secure environment and assured of basic services. The early deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and progress towards resolving the Darfur crisis at the peace talks would enhance the pursuit of humanitarian objectives and save lives, and it is our expectation that all concerned will endeavour to attain those objectives.

The report we have just heard on Somalia confirms that the humanitarian situation has not improved since the last briefing presented to the Council in May. The problems associated with access, protection of civilians and security of humanitarian operations persist. In recent weeks, displacements have increased following worsening violence and bloody clashes between Government troops and insurgents in Mogadishu. This situation has obviously further compounded one of the most difficult humanitarian situations in the world, characterized by chronic food insecurity, alternating droughts and floods and endemic disease. In some areas, severely malnourished children are at risk of death, without help.

Unfortunately, the prevailing insecurity in Mogadishu has seriously curtailed the movement of humanitarian workers. We ask donors to increase their contributions, as well as support, for humanitarian agencies working hard to increase their presence and activities. Civilians are, more than ever, bearing the brunt of these ongoing conflicts. The international community's response to humanitarian problems arising from these conflicts should be appreciated. It has on many occasions called for priority to be given to the protection of civilians.

We recognize, however, that to overcome these material challenges, we need to translate our commitments into action. We believe that the biggest single incentive to humanitarian relief efforts is the establishment of genuine stability so people can return freely and re-establish their lives. This cannot come from a military solution, but rather from inclusive political dialogue and reconciliation.

The President: I will now add a few remarks in my national capacity.

First of all, I would like to join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his very lucid and focused briefing, which was also very worrying.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator's briefings are extremely useful — in fact, essential — for all of us to have a better understanding of the situation on the ground. These briefings are valued by all members as necessary background input for the Council's determinations.

As we have said so many times before, we need an enhanced operational and results-based approach to our action. While sitting in this Chamber, we must never forget that what counts most at the end of the day is whether or not we are able to deliver by bringing increased relief to those who suffer, to the weak and the marginalized.

On Sudan, I will not repeat what previous speakers have already said about the gravity of the situation. Nor will I take up more time, except to call, along with other members, for the full implementation of the moratorium and the Joint Communiqué. What Mr. Holmes told us about the commitment of the authorities is encouraging, notwithstanding the different assessments and analyses of the causes. Despite all efforts along the political and peacekeeping tracks, the humanitarian situation does not show any sign of improvement. This requires immediate action by all and more cooperation on the part of the Sudanese authorities.

As for the Somali region of Ethiopia, the Ogaden, we appreciate the efforts of the United Nations and the Government of Ethiopia to respond to that crisis. We welcome the commitments made by the Ethiopian Government in this regard — notwithstanding the differences in the analyses, gravity and nature of the problem. We hope for a substantial improvement of the

situation soon, and we look forward to receiving an update at a time that the Secretariat deems appropriate.

On Somalia, I wish to repeat once more our strong conviction that this is a test case for the credibility of the United Nations. While listening to Mr. Holmes, I was reminded of the debate that we had recently in this very Chamber on the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2007/643). The recommendations for action contained in that report were very precise and focused. Let me try to apply those recommendations to the case of Somalia, in particular the following actions: ensuring the protection of civilians through clear mandates for peacekeeping missions; ensuring access by humanitarian personnel and their safety and security; and combating sexual and gender-based violence. I am sure that strong and substantial doubts will arise as to whether those goals are being reached in Somalia. As we said during consultations on Somalia last month, we have to draw a more focused operational conclusion from this situation. Based on what previous speakers have said, I think it is clear that we need to turn our attention to Somalia.

In this respect, I wish to bring up two or three points mentioned by Mr. Holmes in his briefing. First of all, we need to further step up our relief efforts. This is clear, and we have to act. The fact that we are well aware of the connection among all four different tracks — political, security, humanitarian and human rights — as well as the development track — should not prevent us from doing something. It would merely be an excuse to say "We can't act here, because this track depends on all the others". However, as Mr. Holmes said, we must step up our relief efforts. In his own words, "There is no simple solution, certainly not a military one".

We also heard from Mr. Holmes that peacekeeping forces need a peace to keep. On this point, I think what the Secretariat means is that, when there is no peace, there can be no peacekeepers. We around this table understand that. We appreciate and share what the Secretariat is telling us. But outside of the United Nations the perception is otherwise. I imagine that other members of the Council also have contacts with civil society, non-governmental organizations, and the media. What I am told is "If you wait for peace, the United Nations will no longer be necessary". So what is the perception that we have to counteract? As many who have taken the floor before me have said, we must make it clear that there can be no selectivity or double standard — no more attention being paid to one crisis and less to another. There is a perception of the fading of full United Nations engagement. I think we have to counteract the perception that the United Nations engagement in Somalia is fading, including in the security area. I believe it was the representative of the United States who said that we need very robust contingency planning, so as to ensure the perception that outside this House we are addressing the issue. I have in mind yesterday's meeting and the initiative of the United Kingdom, which I deeply appreciate.

This meeting between members and the Secretariat has been very useful, and I think we have to work in this direction, because, as Ambassador Holmes said, "lack of high-level attention" — and I imagine that what Ambassador Holmes meant was operational attention —"is not an option for Somalia".

It is difficult, of course, because we have to address two issues here. On the one hand, we must have a greater impact on the ground; on the other, we have to address the perception outside of this House, because what is at stake is our credibility. This has been said by other speakers, perhaps by Panama or Peru. So, addressing this perception, as we know very well, is a most difficult thing, because, inter alia, it can change from one day to the next.

Thank you very much, Ambassador Holmes.

I now resume my function as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Ambassador Holmes to respond to comments and assessments.

Mr. Holmes: May I thank all the delegations who spoke this morning for the support they expressed for the efforts we are making. I was struck by the large measure of agreement around the table on the seriousness of the humanitarian issues I have discussed, on the need to continue to carefully monitor those situations and on the need for political action in all cases to try to remove the causes of those problems, because — as someone remarked here today, and I fully agree — humanitarian help can only be a sticking plaster, not a solution for these problems.

Many speakers, including you yourself, Mr. President, have talked about the need for and the importance of peacekeeping operations in two of the situations we have been discussing, that is, the earliest

possible deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in Darfur and the strengthening of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). I fully agree that those forces need early deployment and strengthening in order to create better environments for civilians and for humanitarian workers to operate.

I note that there are still in some areas — and I saw this again when I was in Darfur in some internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, for example — some exaggerated expectations of the likelihood of UNAMID transforming the situation overnight. I think we need to keep those expectations in check to avoid too much disappointment afterwards, because it is clear that it will take some time for UNAMID to reach its full capacity. In any case, as I said, some of the expectations in some of the camps are simply not aligned with reality.

You make some powerful points, Sir, about the need to avoid any suggestion of a double standard existing between Somalia and Darfur. I do not want to go into this in too much detail. That is obviously more the business of my colleagues in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and in the Department of Political Affairs.

Of course, I agree that when we talk about a peace to keep, we should not be thinking about a perfectly peaceful situation, because we certainly do not need a peacekeeping force at that point. I think the point I know I have tried to make is that some kind of political framework is needed, some kind of situation in which to try to support a political process; otherwise the situation can become very difficult indeed, and it is possible for contingents to become part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Having said that, I think we all entirely accept the need for the kind of contingency planning that has been talked about and for a possible United Nations successor force to AMISOM.

Many delegations commented on the problems of security that underlie so many of the humanitarian problems in the areas I have been talking about. Again, I fully agree with that. I did not make the point in my initial intervention, but what would be extremely valuable — in particular, I think, in Darfur, but also in Somalia — would be some kind of cessation of hostilities that could be agreed to by all sides and that would give a respite at the very least, if not a more lasting relief, from the fighting and the violence, which is what causes the humanitarian problems or makes them so much worse.

I take the opportunity to say that I still think a humanitarian ceasefire in Darfur is necessary. There have been suggestions by the Government of the Sudan that they are prepared to contemplate that, as long as others reciprocate. That would obviously be extremely useful and would help to avert some of the problems I have discussed.

Similarly in Somalia — however difficult it may seem in present circumstances — a cessation of hostilities, if it could be agreed, would be extremely valuable, not least because of the situation in Mogadishu itself.

One or two other points came up during the discussion. I think the delegation of the United Kingdom mentioned the desirability of a further meeting of the High-level Committee that was designed to follow the implementation of the Joint Communiqué on Facilitation of Humanitarian Assistance in Darfur, and I entirely agree. The reason there has not been a recent meeting — I think the last meeting was in September — is because there has not been a Minister for Humanitarian Affairs in the Sudan as a result of the difficulties between the north and the south over the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

But I accept that we need to move to a meeting as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the procedures under that High-level Committee have not ceased and have continued to operate. But I entirely agree that a meeting of the High-level Committee would be desirable soon.

One or two delegations commented correctly on the impact of weather on some of these humanitarian situations and that is certainly the case. I would draw the attention of the Council to some early indications I heard while I was in Darfur that the harvest in Darfur this year, at least in the south and the north, will likely be poor. That is going to put an extra strain on our humanitarian operations. So we will be planning to step up our food relief efforts, not only to those in camps, but also to the wider population who may face a longer hunger gap than normal.

Several delegations mentioned the question of piracy off Somalia. Allow me to take the opportunity to

welcome the steps that have been taken to try to reduce and eliminate it, not least the protection given by French naval vessels to the recent World Food Programme ship that arrived in Merca a few days ago. Some delegations also referred to the incident that that gave rise to, when there seemed to be a ban on humanitarian operations in that particular region. That was happily resolved. But this is an illustration of the problems we face in Somalia with the authorities, and I very much hope that the new Government and its new Prime Minister will take a very different attitude in the future and will facilitate humanitarian aid much more.

Meanwhile, the dangers faced by humanitarian workers are illustrated again by the fact that a World Food Programme driver was killed — I think earlier today in Afghanistan — which again is an illustration of the problems we face.

Many people referred, as I did myself, to the very serious situation in Mogadishu, the apparently indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks going on there and reciprocal fighting, which is having a terrible effect on the civilians. I agree that that is a terrible problem. We need to repeat that those who are operating in Mogadishu from all sides must be regarded as accountable for their actions. I think that is a very important principle to stress.

Several delegations referred also to the very worrying situation in eastern Chad, which obviously has a linkage with what is going on in Darfur. I agree that that is profoundly preoccupying. Humanitarian operations are having great difficulty in continuing while fighting between the Government and rebels is going on. Movement is heavily restricted, and if that situation is not resolved quickly it will start to have a very serious impact on the ground in terms of the help we can give to the 230,000 refugees in camps in eastern Chad and the 180,000 internally displaced persons who are also there. This is something we need to follow very carefully. I hope the fighting will stop soon, and I echo the calls that others have made for a final end to mutual support of rebels across that border.

Mr. President, you referred to the importance of the protection of civilians in the particular context of Somalia. I entirely agree that if we compare the kind of issues that we were raising in the report of the Secretary-General in November and the situation in Somalia, that is clear illustration of how far we have to go in some of these areas.

Finally, I thank delegations for their interest and support. Once again, the support of this Council is absolutely vital for what we are trying to achieve. Let me reassure all concerned that we will continue to do all that we can to face up to these humanitarian problems and to step up our relief efforts in all three of those places, because they are profoundly worrying and they do have implications. They are a reflection of the peace and security problems in that area and probably also have implications for the peace and security problems in this highly explosive area in the Horn of Africa, if we do not resolve those problems quickly.

The President: Thank you, Under-Secretary-General Holmes for the clarifications you provided and for your, I repeat, very comprehensive, lucid and effective briefing.

There are no further speakers who wish to take the floor. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.